We are starting this Spring 2019 term in an unusual position. Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed an unprecedented 8% increase—$562 million more—to the CSU’s budget for the 2019-20 fiscal year. For the first time in our collective memory, we begin a state budget season without having to immediately fight for the money the CSU needs. We have a governor who understands the People’s University, our students’ struggle to afford college, and the needs of the faculty who provide that education. That’s because of our hard work over the years, and is proof positive of the power of our union.

I want to tell a story about how proud I am to exercise power with my faculty colleagues (and students and allies) through our union. This is a story about our positive uses of power.

The Nature of Power

My field is political philosophy, so I think about power a lot. Power gets a bad rap. When we hear the word “power,” we often think of autocratic power, unjust uses of power over and against someone or some group, or power used to hoard wealth for a sole individual instead of what’s good for the whole of society. Unfortunately, there are tons of examples of these uses of power.

Yet there is another way to think about power. Power can be cultivated to correct injustices, to gain resources for those who need and deserve it, and to protect the public good.

As faculty, we know why we use the power we have—for our students, for our colleagues, and for the conditions that make what we do as educators possible. From the perspective of the union, we often think of protecting all of these things through our rights in the collective bargaining agreement, but

“All organizing is science fiction. When organizers imagine a world without poverty, without war, borders or prisons — that’s science fiction. They’re moving beyond the boundaries of what is possible or realistic, into the realm of what we are told is impossible. Being able to collectively dream those new worlds means that we can begin to create these new worlds here.”

—Walidah Imarisha, Octavia’s Brood
Above: In Spring 2017, then Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom stood in opposition to a proposal to raise student tuition as a way to offset the lack of state funding for the CSU. Newsom, as an ex officio member of the CSU Board of Trustees, voted against the tuition increase. He also urged Trustees and CSU Chancellor Timothy White to request the funding the CSU needs at the outset of the budget cycle. That was a meaningful moment, as he showed both leadership and an ability to relate to our students. It expressed his relationship to us as faculty in the CSU, and to his understanding of what we are going through to deliver quality education to our students.

At left: On April 4, 2018, CFA and Students for Quality Education hosted a day of action at the State Capitol, where more than 1,000 students and faculty rallied and called for Gov. Jerry Brown and Legislators to increase state funding for the CSU. It worked, as Brown increased state funding for the CSU by $364 million for the 2018-19 fiscal year.

Bottom: Given Newsom’s long-standing commitment to the CSU and its students and faculty, CFA hosted a campaign event at San Diego State University, capping off an election season of political work by our members. The rally drew hundreds of Newsom’s supporters and media interest. On Nov. 6, Newsom was elected as Governor of California. In January, he proposed increasing additional funding to the CSU by an unprecedented $562 million.
All of our work is connected

that's not the only venue where we exercise positive power. We work to secure racial and social justice, and to address the conditions that affect all members of our CSU community. CFA has been building positive power to effect real change in the CSU since 1983. That is not to say these exercises of positive power have been easy or that we always prevail, but we have attempted to craft a future that serves faculty, students, and the cause of justice for the entire state of California.

We often think of each term, academic year, and political season as discrete events, but from the perspective of the union, the steps to building positive power take years and each step builds upon the last.

In thinking about the raises that CSU faculty received last year (3.5% in November 2018) and will get this year (2.5% in July 2019), they were the direct result of faculty power carrying over from our last contract fight.

Before that, we were aided by the political power we have built by helping good, public higher education-minded public officials get elected to key leadership positions. This added to the pressure felt by our employer to settle the contract. CFA has been cultivating that political power since its inception.

This is the model for positive power; it builds from one action to the next. It is generative. When we fight, we win, and when we exercise power, that strength carries us into the next fight.

The Present Builds Upon The Past

Looking back at CFA’s campaign to make significant gains in the current 2018-19 CSU budget, we can trace the origins to that fight in 2015 when the CFA Assembly adopted a resolution making anti-racism and social justice transformation a central part of our mission. That commitment created the frame for our future budget advocacy.

In January 2017, CFA published “Equity Interrupted: How California is Cheating Its Future.” This report laid out the clear and demonstrable facts about the way the CSU budget had declined over the last 30 years, and made the connection between the lack of public funding and the increase in students of color.

This insight spurred us to advocate for a larger state funding increase than the CSU Board of Trustees had requested at the time. CFA didn’t talk only about the divestment of funding, but also about the problem of students’ access to a place in the CSU. In our campaign for better state funding, we emphasized that about 31,000 eligible students were being turned away each year, undermining the promise that the CSU is supposed to fulfill.

Our campaign heated up on a cool day a year ago, where on the State Capitol lawn CFA displayed 1,570 empty chairs, one for every 20 students the CSU turned away in 2016-17. Governor Jerry Brown was announcing his budget plan inside. Our advocacy continued through to a huge rally on April 4, when more than 1,000 students, faculty, staff, and allies, including the Chancellor and two CSU Trustees, came together in a big, beautiful, and artful gathering to advocate for the state funding the CSU really needs. We kept up the pressure with CFA’s Lobby Day at the Capitol on May 1.

On June 27, 2018, Governor Brown signed into law a 2018-19 state budget that included $364 million in additional funding for the CSU. That resulted in enrollment growth to accommodate 3,641 additional full-time-equivalent students, and the budget includes money to support that cohort for four years.

The increased funding also included $25 million in dedicated funding, with legislative oversight, to hire more tenure-track faculty.

That funding increase far exceeded the CSU administration’s original funding request and was nearly four times Governor Brown’s initial plan. It was an unprecedented shift, and it happened as a direct results of the advocacy of CFA and Students for Quality Education.

When we fight, we win.

What’s Next?

Now we are at a next frontier of our advocacy for the CSU.

CFA members worked hard to elect Gavin Newsom as our new Governor and Tony Thurmond as our Superintendent of Public Instruction. We endorsed them because they had proven track records of championing public higher education and strong commitments to continue.

Governor Newsom made yet another breakthrough in January when he proposed a historic increase in funding for the CSU. We must engage lawmakers to adopt this funding that is to go into effect on July 1; we are confident they will, so long as we continue our advocacy.

"There is another way to think about power. Power can be cultivated to correct injustices, to gain resources for those who need and deserve it, and to protect the public good.”
The amount of proposed increased funding to the CSU. This includes:

- $300 million more to the CSU's core (ongoing) budget. That could translate to 7,000 more students gaining access to the CSU.
- $262 million in one-time money, including money to combat student homelessness and hunger.

With this enormous commitment from the state, it is our duty to hold the CSU administration accountable for how they spend this new money. We must ensure that state funding is used for the core mission of the CSU, which is to provide high-quality education to California’s students. This means access for more students, more tenure track faculty, and more mental health counselors to help students achieve success and graduate.

That, in turn, means the CSU administration must hire more tenure track faculty and reduce its reliance on temporary faculty on short-term contracts. The lack of tenure line faculty creates a significant workload problem for tenure track faculty, who are overburdened with curriculum, program, advising, and governance. Tenure line faculty hiring has fallen significantly behind as the number of students are steadily increasing. Meanwhile, Lecturer faculty endure permanent precarity and lack of respect for their qualifications and abilities. It is a moral failure on the part of CSU management.

In no time at all, we will find ourselves negotiating our next contract. The way we build power now will have a tremendous influence on our ability to enter those negotiations from a position of strength based on the groundwork that we laying right now.

The channels of positive power that we generate are many—some are structural, political, and formal, and some are moral and relational, so-called “soft forms of power.” But on all fronts, the power we’ve been building collectively over the past several years will again transfer forward; that power will enable us to support our work and protect our livelihoods and working conditions through the next negotiations.

Hope For The Future

Last summer, I had the good fortune to go to Detroit to attend a workshop for activists and community organizers led by adrienne maree brown, author of Emergent Strategy (a book I recommend if you are interested in social change). Working with these amazing people from all over the country, I emerged with two insights. First, the future is going to be very different than the present, and it’s coming sooner than we think.

For those of us who think the current world situation looks bleak (and I admit that sometimes this applies to me), the good news is that a huge generational shift is coming and that shift seeks to use positive power to benefit everyone. We can see it in our students and their new ways of viewing the world. The young activists and organizers in Detroit gave me the same feeling of hope for the future.

Second, I am so fortunate to create the future with my union siblings in CFA and with our coalition of white folks, Indigenous people, and people of color who care deeply about quality, affordable, accessible public higher education. Our union works to hold the doors of the future open so that all of these young activists, innovators, teachers, scientists, and makers of the future can walk through it.

Science fiction creates dreams of the future; organizing and working together in solidarity makes them real. The recent history of CFA is a case in point.

2019-20 CSU Budget By the Numbers...

Governor Gavin Newsom’s first proposal for a 2019–20 California state budget, released on January 10, includes more than $209 billion in total spending. Total funding for the California State University, which would amount to $7.8 billion if approved by the Legislature, is included in that plan. The budget plan includes an unprecedented increase in ongoing and one-time funding for the CSU.

$562m

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8%

The percentage represented by the proposed additional funding. By contrast, Gov. Jerry Brown’s 2018 budget proposal included just 3%—$92.1 million—in increased funding for the CSU.

We’ve come a long way in just one year!

0

The amount tuition would increase under Gov. Newsom’s proposal. Gov. Newsom is holding fast to his commitment to California’s students and efforts to keep public higher education affordable, proposing that tuition in the CSU be frozen at current levels.

Learn More about our Budget Advocacy: Calfac.org/2019-20-CSU-Budget